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SADDAM AND THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

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*The objective in war is a better state of peace.*¹

Sir Basil Liddell Hart

In September of 1980, Saddam Hussein initiated an offensive land war with Iran to realize Liddell Hart's prophetic desire for a better state of peace. He failed. Often viewed as an egotistical and demonic dictator, Saddam nevertheless was a sovereign leader with objectives, resources and a gameplan to reach his desired endstate. Saddam failed initially, because he poorly marshaled his instruments of national power to achieve his objectives. After eight years of conflict he finally orchestrated his tools of statecraft effectively, enabling Iraq to conclude the Iran-Iraq War on acceptable terms. The key to Saddam's eventual success depended on modification of his initial 1980 objectives to accomplish a more realistic endstate in 1988.

To prove this proposition, we will not present a history of the Iran-Iraq conflict. After all, Saddam's war against Iran spanned eight years, over twice as long as the United States' involvement in the Second World War. Rather, this paper focuses on key elements of Saddam's grand strategy. We will first review Iraq's strategic environment and then examine how Saddam executed his strategy by dividing the war into three distinct phases: Iraq's initial offensive operations (September 1980 to the winter of 1981), Iran's counter-offensive (winter of 1981 to summer of 1987), and finally, Iraq's counter-offensive (summer of 1987 to summer of 1988). The war was far more complex than these three phases. However this phased approach provides a useful demonstration of how Saddam matured as a national leader.

¹ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2d ed. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967), page 338.

Strategic Content

Given his political and strategic milieu, Saddam went to war for a traditional *real politik* motive...to safeguard his position. For over 14 centuries, the peoples living in the area of modern day Iraq and Iran clashed due to the intersection of the Islamic Sunni and Shiite sects there. Uninhibited passions were a habitual ingredient in this region. In 1975, Iran and Iraq signed the Algiers Agreement in an attempt to mitigate these pressures. In this accord, Iran promised not to excite Iraq's Shiites and Kurd minority in exchange for half of the Shatt al-Arab Waterway. However, the return of the Ayatollah Khomeini and emergence of his Islamic Revolution in Iran caused a resurgence in Shiite ideological struggle and exacerbated the Sunni-Shiite conflict. For his own reasons, Khomeini repudiated the existing accord with a series of provocations against Iraq. In June 1979, he called publicly for Iraqi Shiites, who comprised sixty percent of Iraq's population, to rise up against Saddam. Iran reinforced this rhetoric with financial and material support to the Shiites and Kurdish minority. Finally, in April 1980 an assassination attempt on Tariq Aziz demonstrated the intensity of Iran's desire to unseat Saddam and his Sunni-based, Ba'ath Party.² Clearly, the Islamic fundamentalist movement threatened Saddam's regime and existence.

Beyond these historic animosities, there are a number of other differences between these countries. Iran represented a potentially more powerful nation. In 1975, Iran's Gross Domestic Product was \$49.5 billion, compared to Iraq's \$16.1 billion.³ In

² Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* (New York: Free Press/MacMillan 1991), pp. 138-139.

³ Country Profile: Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa (data base on-line), Iran; <http://www.ifc.org/camena/iran.htm>, accessed 11 October 2000 and Country Profile: Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa (data base on-line), Iraq; <http://www.ifc.org/camena/iraq.htm>, accessed 11 October 2000

addition, by 1980 Iran had three times the population (38 million to 13 million) and spent nearly twice as much on defense (\$4.2 billion to \$2.7 billion).⁴ On the positive side for Iraq, her booming economy improved from \$2 billion worth of oil sales in 1972 to over \$26 billion in 1980.⁵ Iraq's prosperity was clearly on the rise and would rival Iran's.

Physical geography of the two nations was also significant. Iran's capital, Tehran, was located far inside her borders. Iranian access to the sea extended along a coastline hundreds of miles long on both the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Iraq, on the other hand, possessed only several miles of coastline along the northern Persian Gulf with inland access limited to the Shatt al-Arab Waterway. At the same time, Iraq's border exposed her to three vulnerabilities. If Iran struck across her southern region, Iraq would be cut off from the sea. In the east central region near the Iranian border, Baghdad was in easy striking distance of Iranian forces. Finally, in the north, Iraq's lucrative oil producing region around Kirkuk was vulnerable to a quick Iranian attack. Thus, Iraq's geography left it considerably more vulnerable than Iran.

The belligerents' distinctive history, culture and *weltanschung* shaped the roots of the Iran-Iraq conflict. In no other region of the world did Islamic discord, frustrated ancient power struggles, and contemporary economic expectations intersect while operating under the microscope of superpower attentiveness. These factors shaped Saddam's calculus as he contemplated going to war in 1980.

Assumptions

Given these strategic conditions, Saddam based his actions on several key assumptions. At the strategic level, he presumed that the US and USSR would not react

⁴ William O. Staudenmaier, "A Strategic Analysis," in *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts*, edited by Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983) pp 30-31.

to his ground offensive into Iran. If Saddam restricted his actions to primarily a land campaign and did not disrupt the flow of oil, this appeared a reasonable consideration. Second, he assumed no Arab country would protest his invasion. Islamic fundamentalism represented a threat to conservative regimes like the Saudi and Kuwaiti monarchies. Saddam's offensive tangentially benefited his Arab brethren. As a result, Saddam anticipated they would not dispute his invasion.

At the tactical and operational level, Saddam assumed he could launch an offensive with a predominately Shiite-manned army against a Shiite nation without inciting his own Shiite population to revolt or frustrate his efforts. Why Saddam thought this is unclear, but it would be a significant constraint as we shall see later. To mitigate this internal threat, Saddam needed to make the campaign quick and with as few casualties as possible. As a result, Saddam wanted the conflict to last only 3-5 weeks.⁶ His expectation became his strategy.

Opportunity

In 1980, three key factors converged and provided Saddam a critical window of opportunity in which to act. First, Iran was an outlaw nation. The Iranian hostage crisis isolated Iran. Saddam needed to act before the US and Iran resolved this situation and the rest of the world courted normal relations with Iran. Saddam anticipated Iran would receive little world sympathy in light of its unprecedented role in the taking of diplomatic hostages, a clear violation of international law. Second, Saddam sought to capitalize on the decimated state of Iran's officer corps. The Islamic Revolution's fury purged a

⁵ Karsh, page 136.

⁶ John Antal, "The Iraqi Army Forged in the Other Gulf War," Military Review, February 1991, pp 63-64.

significant portion of her military leadership. The deficit of professional military leadership at the unit and theater level could prove a windfall for Iraq. As a military officer, Saddam understood the intangible and decisive role of leadership in military actions...and the potential cost of not having it. Finally, Egypt had recently discredited itself in the eyes of many Arab nations with its Israeli peace accord. Saddam sought to seize the opportunity to take the leadership role among the Pan-Arab states with a decisive defeat of the Iranian/Persian menace.⁷ A victory would mark the ascendancy of Saddam's power. To succeed, he needed a victory before the 1982 non-aligned conference in Baghdad. The confluence of these diverse factors gave Saddam impetus to act in 1980.

Threats and constraints

Balanced against this window of opportunity, Saddam faced little external threat, other than Iran. He could prevent Western and US intervention if he did not interrupt the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf. This consideration reinforced his concept to rely on a symmetrical army-vis-army approach and seek a decisive land battle. In addition, the majority of Arab nations like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, welcomed Saddam's action to neutralize the Persian menace.⁸

From an internal perspective, Saddam's greatest threat was his own Shiite population staging an uprising in the wake of his war. Since Shiites made up sixty percent of the Iraqi population, they also made up a large portion of his army. As a result, he pursued a casualty averse strategy in order to reduce the risk of a mutiny on the

⁷ Straudenmaier, page 29.

⁸ Staudenmaier, page 42.

part of his Shiites.⁹ Finally, a healthy, expanding Iraqi economy constrained Saddam. A long war risked the Iraqi people's rising standard of living. In 1979, Iraq exported \$21 billion worth of oil; in 1980, it exported nearly five billion more.¹⁰ A prosperous economy would sustain Saddam's popularity at home.

Ends

Operating in this strategic environment, Saddam's core objective was clear: his survival and that of his regime. It is important to note, that prior to turning to the military instrument, Saddam attempted to use his diplomatic and information tools to minimize the Iranian threat. Immediately after Khomeini came to power, Saddam extended a diplomatic overture to Iran seeking to form a close relationship based on "mutual respect and non-interference" in each other's affairs.¹¹ When Iran rejected this, Saddam resorted to an informational campaign to portray himself as a deeply religious man and an heir to Caliph Ali and the prophet Muhammad. Saddam accompanied these pronouncements with speeches extolling Shiite values, passed a law banning gambling, and visited Shiite communities to disperse large sums of money to help the community.¹² The mullahs in Tehran and Iraqi Shiites viewed these overtures for what they were: pragmatic, empty gestures aimed at derailing their revolutionary efforts in Iraq.

Saddam alternated his non-lethal initiatives with repressive measures inside Iraq. Saddam forced the exile of significant Shiite religious figures and murder of key Shiite leaders. All together, his efforts failed to quell the fundamentalist threat. The

⁹ Staudenmaier, page 45.

¹⁰ Karsh, page 136.

¹¹ Karsh, page 138

¹² Karsh, pp. 144-145.

assassination attempt on Aziz in April convinced Saddam that he must act with force against Iran. Failing to act invited a return to the situation in the early 1970's when Iran's support to insurgencies in Iraq debilitated his country.

Willingness, capability and clear political objectives did not easily translate into suitable military objectives for Saddam. Politically, his objective was straightforward: security of his regime. To support this, he sought to end Iranian support of insurgent Shiites and Kurds in Iraq. Second, he sought to seize control of the area east of the Shatt al-Arab Waterway negotiated away in 1975. Saddam expected victory over Iran would catapult him to leadership of the pan-Arab/non-aligned movement and demonstrate Iraq's emergence as a regional power.¹³

To support these political ends, Saddam's military objectives were two-fold. First, he sought to seize key land east of the Shatt al-Arab Waterway to include the Khuzistan province. Second, by defeating the Iranian army and seizing territory, he sought to punish Iran and deter her from future support to insurgencies inside Iraq.¹⁴

Some analysts, such as Efraim Karsh in his book Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography, suggested that Saddam also sought to cause the Islamic regime's collapse through a single "decisive" defeat of the Iranian army in the field.¹⁵ Such a notion is out of character for Saddam and the capability of forces he dedicated to the effort. It is incongruous to consider that Saddam seriously believed only four divisions committed to the offensive could inflict a catastrophic defeat on a nation the size of Iran.¹⁶ His combat

¹³ Phillip Robins, "Iraq in the Gulf War: Objectives, Strategies and Problems," Chapter 5 in Hanns W. Maull and Otto Pick, *The Gulf War: Regional and International Dimensions*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 47-48.

¹⁴ Karsh, page 147.

¹⁵ Karsh, page 221.

¹⁶ Antal, page 65.

experience against the Kurds and Israel provided him the experience to know better. Saddam, if nothing else, continually proved himself astute and capable of learning. More likely, he viewed his favorable balances of forces as a means to secure a limited amount of land in a short campaign. He would then use this success to bargain with Khomeini to end Iranian support of insurgencies in Iraq, or use the incursion as a punishment of Iran. The preponderance of evidence suggests Saddam envisioned, pursued and anticipated only a limited offensive campaign.

Unfortunately he significantly misjudged Khomeini and Iran in two ways. First, he failed to recognize the nature of the war into which he entered. From Saddam's perspective, he was not expecting much from Iran except to leave Iraq alone and yield a small amount of territory. To Khomeini however, Iraq threatened the existence of not just Iran, but the Islamic Revolution. He viewed the war as an ideological fight for survival. As a result, Iran responded with tremendous passion. Saddam's attack fit perfectly into Khomeini's ideological and theological view that Islam must oppose and defeat its secular foes. Thus Saddam failed to recognize his limited war was Khomeini's unlimited war. Secondly, Saddam miscalculated in assuming that a simple defeat of the Iranian army would compel Iran to cease its support to insurgencies in Iraq. There is little historical or specific evidence to suggest that a nation's defeat in traditional, set piece battle would motivate it to cease covert actions in another nation.

Means

With these political and military goals set, why did Saddam think he could succeed? After all, Iran was potentially stronger than Iraq with three times the population and a military force almost twice that of Iraq's. Saddam believed the nature and quality

of his armed forces gave him an advantage; he recognized military force is made up of more than just people and budget. Iraq possessed more tanks than Iran (2,850 to 1,985 Iranian tanks), had near parity in artillery and fielded 25 percent more soldiers. Meanwhile Iran's only materiel advantage was in number of combat aircraft (445 to 332 Iraqi aircraft).¹⁷ In addition, Saddam recognized the readiness status of Iranian armed forces was marginal as a result of turmoil created by the Islamic Revolution. For example, the lack of spare parts grounded Iran's 77 advanced F-14 fighter aircraft.¹⁸ Thus, Iraq not only had more forces, it had more operationally capable forces.

Iraq's qualitative superiority extended to other areas. Iraqi units had more combat experience from their operations against the Kurds and their participation in the 1973 war with Israel. In addition, Iraq's command and control apparatus was potentially better because it replicated the British command structure. While initially ineffective, Iraq revitalized this structure into an effective tool in the final phase of the Iran-Iraq War. Nonetheless, from the beginning Saddam enjoyed a more centralized command network than his Iranian opposition. Iran's military command problems reflected the on-going political power struggle between religious and secular portions of the government. Islamic fundamentalists in the Pasadarn (Iranian militia) took orders from Khomeini, while the regular army took orders from President Bani-Sadar. The Islamic Revolution also significantly degraded Iran's military capabilities following its purging of the officer corps throughout all regular Iranian units.¹⁹ On balance, Saddam's military forces enjoyed both a quantitative and qualitative superiority in the summer of 1980.

¹⁷ Staudenmaier, page 30.

¹⁸ Staudenmaier, page 31.

¹⁹ Staudenmaier, pp. 31-32.

War: Phase I

Saddam initiated the first phase of the conflict on 18 September 1980. He relied principally on his land force to gain his objectives. Launching four divisions, the Iraqi 45,000-man force invaded along three axes into Iran.²⁰ Saddam concentrated his primary effort on the south axis, where Iraqi forces quickly isolated Khorramshahr, Abadan and Ahwaz. In the center, Iraq seized Mehran and pushed almost to the Zagros Mountains in Iran. In the north, Iraq gained critical terrain near Qasr-E-Shirin. The central and northern axes were effective in protecting Baghdad and oil-rich Kirkuk.²¹

After two weeks of fighting, Saddam declared victory. However this announcement was hollow and premature. Iraq achieved only a portion of its two military objectives--seizing the terrain east of the Shatt al-Arab Waterway. The Iranian army was not defeated. Iraq's army lacked the boldness to exploit its combined arms forces to decisively defeat the Iranian army. Instead, the Iraqi army was caught in a self-defeating contradiction. On one hand, they wanted to close with and destroy the Iranian army, but lacked the doctrinal and organization finesse to do so. Bold action risked casualties, which Saddam could not afford to absorb. When the Iranian army retreated inside the key cities of Khorramshahr, Abadan and Ahwaz, the Iraqi army was unprepared both in training and strategic resolve. Saddam did not prepare or train his army for urban warfare because it would cause high casualty rates. As a result, he sent armor forces alone into Khorramshahr, naively anticipating that they offered the best protection for his troops. After suffering over 7,000 casualties and losing 100 tanks, the

²⁰ Antal, page 65.

²¹ Staudenmaier, page 37.

Iraqis captured the town. Following this battle, they resorted to slow laborious maneuvers dominated by artillery barrages aimed at beating the Iranian army into submission.²² To secure Abadan, Iraq laid siege to the town for the next year rather than engage in direct urban combat again.

Thus, Saddam's initial offensive reflected deep miscalculation in connecting his objectives, means and the nature of the war. During this period, Saddam's casualty-averse approach frustrated his primary military objective to defeat the Iranian army. To conduct the offensive as required, the circumstances required an aggressiveness that risked casualties. The disconnect in Saddam's strategic design is further evidenced by the success of the operational objectives, yet failure of those to yield his larger national objective. Defeating the Iranian army would not convince Iran to halt its support to insurgents in Iraq. In the end, Clausewitz anticipated the cause of Saddam's failure when he wrote: "timidity will do a thousand times more damage in war than audacity."²³ Saddam paid a high price for his cautious, casualty-averse approach--it denied him a quick victory.

Saddam also failed with regard to his use of his other military forces. To support his objectives, he declared a maritime exclusion zone around Iran's Kharg Island. However, in 1980 he did not have the air and naval forces to enforce it. Iraq's navy, comprised primarily of small patrol boats, was insufficient to accomplish this task. It was also ineffective in breaking Iran's blockade of Iraq.²⁴ Almost three years passed before Saddam obtained five French made Mirage aircraft capable of reaching and striking

²² Antal, page 64.

²³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984) page 191.

²⁴ Staudenmaier, page 41.

targets around Kharg Island. Even then, he did not have sufficient quantity of forces to gain the effects he desired.

Likewise, Saddam misused his air force. He attempted a 1967 Israeli-style, pre-emptive strike, but failed to concentrate his air effort. He attacked a mixture of military and economic targets in piecemeal fashion. As a result, he did not destroy the Iranian air force on the ground. This failure not only allowed Iran to strike back at Iraq, it allowed Iran to intimidate the other regional Arab states. Iran's potential to strike at Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait reduced their overt support for Iraq.²⁵

While Saddam achieved marginal success on the battlefield, he succeeded in the diplomatic arena during this initial phase. Iraqi diplomats translated the international loathing of Iran for its handling of the US hostages into delaying the UN Security Council meeting on the issue of the war until after Iraq achieved its partial territorial goals. When the Security Council did pass UNSCR 479, Iraq achieved another tactical victory with the UN calling for a ceasefire with forces remaining in-place.²⁶ In this manner, Saddam demonstrated an adroitness to harmonize his diplomatic instrument with his military forces to advance his objectives.

War: Phase II

Saddam's failure to anticipate the nature of the conflict and his poorly conceived strategy allowed the war to drag on through the summer of 1981. By that point, Iran mobilized her tremendous reserves to drive Iraq out of Iran and back to Basra. In an effective, though often inefficient series of military offensives, Iran transformed the

²⁵ Staudenmaier, page 43.

²⁶ Robins, page 49.

conflict from Saddam's limited enterprise to Khomeini's unlimited war of attrition. Iran started with its first counteroffensive in early 1981. By September of 1981, she combined human-wave attacks by Iranian revolutionary guards with attacks by regular forces to lift the siege of Abadan. In early 1982, Iran repeated this tactic to re-take Khorramshahr. The net effect of these offensives compelled Saddam to order his forces to fall back. The conflict resembled contemporary World War I style trench warfare, only with more advanced weaponry.²⁷ In this manner, Iran gained the battlefield initiative and Saddam could not retain his meager territorial objective. He botched the use of war as a "means of reinforcing the Iraqi regime" or of gaining concessions from Iran on the battlefield. Saddam learned Clausewitz's notion that war, once undertaken, will follow a path of its own reasoning and logic.

This second phase dragged on until 1987. The seasons drove the fighting as much as the military objectives. Iran delayed its military actions until after its farm laborers finished working the fields.²⁸ On the other hand, the Iranian army's professionalism improved as the country's latent power transformed into real power at the front. In 1986, Iran launched *Operation Fatah al-Mubin*, which captured the Al Faw Peninsula in Iraq and destroyed three Iraqi divisions in a Cannae-like battle. After these successes, Khomeini attempted to crush Saddam in one last effort with the capture of Basra. Basra was Iraq's second largest city and key to its access to the Persian Gulf. The loss of it would be a significant physical and psychological blow to Iraq. To do this, Iran prepared

²⁷ Antal, page 65.

²⁸ Robins, page 50.

for a year and attacked in late 1987. The resulting battle culminated Iran's counter-offensive in a Verdun-esque battle. In the end, Iran did not capture the city.²⁹

This second phase highlighted three key lessons. First, the Iranian battlefield success reflected the over-politicized nature of Iraq's senior officer corps. Saddam selected and promoted commanders for their loyalty to the regime...not for their combat acumen. Iraq's problems were compounded by its junior officers' lack of initiative and the Iraqi armies reliance on rehearsal. Iraq's previous offensive achievements had relied upon rehearsal; defensive operations, by their nature, do not permit rehearsal.³⁰

Second, Saddam obtained partial success with his other military tools. His air force generated 200 combat sorties per day. While the majority of these sorties were flown as ground support of marginal utility, they demonstrated that Iraq enjoyed a degree of air superiority over the battlefield. This activity forced the Iranians to attack at sub-optimal times to minimize their exposure to Iraqi air attack, at night or during poor weather.³¹

Finally, in this second phase of the war, Saddam was effective in forging his military strategy. He succeeded to link his means to his objective. Saddam abandoned his initial objectives of capturing territory or defeating the Iranian army as a means to dissuade Iran from supporting Iraqi insurgencies. In the same manner, Saddam failed in his tangential purpose of using the war to catapult Iraq to the forefront of the non-aligned/pan-Arab movement. Now, Saddam's objective was survival. In a war of attrition, as long as Saddam maintained an army in the field, he achieved his new

²⁹ Antal, pp 65-66.

³⁰ Antal, page 64.

³¹ Karsh, page 217.

objective. In this sense, he validated Clausewitz. “What is the object of defense?” wrote Clausewitz, “Preservation.”³² Saddam preserved his regime.

This new strategy contained risk. It is unknown how much of this Saddam recognized. The Iranians could have defeated him either by persevering and sustaining more casualties in order to capture Basra, or by shifting the main effort from the southern theater around Basra to the central region and strike directly at Baghdad. Given the exhausted nature of Iranian forces during this time, it is speculative as to whether or not such a shift would have succeeded. Nonetheless, either potential outcome represented a significant risk to Saddam’s strategy during phase two.

War: Phase III

When the Iranians called off the offensive around Basra, Saddam recognized the Iranians had reached their culminating point. Saddam seized the initiative and expanded his strategy to effectively use all his tools of national security. In the final phase of the war, his overall objective remained preservation his regime. His military objective became driving Iranian forces out of Iraq in order to return to a *status quo ante* and terminate the war.

To support this objective Saddam first restructured his armed forces. He formed elite Presidential Guard units skilled in urban warfare, decentralized tactical control and encouraged junior officers to take initiative.³³ In this manner, he finally capitalized on the British staff command structure he inherited.

³² Clausewitz, page 357.

³³ Antal, page 67.

Next, he altered how he employed his armed forces. The Iraqi army returned to detailed rehearsal. They emphasized concentrating decisive combat power at the point of attack, with attacker-to-defender ratios as high as 6-to-1. He also expanded the use of air forces and broadened the conflict. Saddam launched the Tanker War and used his air power to target Iranian economic and oil production facilities.³⁴ The effect of these initiatives decreased Iranian oil exports from 1.6 to 0.6 million barrels per day.³⁵ At the same time, Saddam procured improved missile technology, allowing Iraq to strike deeper into Iran. In February 1988, Saddam launched a three-month “war of the cities” campaign. He targeted and terrorized previously unscathed Iranian cities of Tehran, Isfaha and the Holy City of Qom with missile and gas attacks.³⁶ Saddam pushed Iran to the brink of collapse. After having bled the Iranian army to near exhaustion in his defense of Basra, he now exploited Iran’s inability to protect its economic base and population.

In late spring of 1988, Saddam launched a campaign to bring the war to an end. The first battle recaptured the Al Faw Peninsula. In a two- axis attack, the Iraqi army moved under the cover of darkness, used special forces to prepare a breakthrough, called upon over 300 air force sorties to isolate the battlefield, included an amphibious assault to envelop the Iranian forces, and used well timed gas attacks to immobilizes the defenses in place.³⁷ In the final battle, the Iraqi army advanced 40 miles into Iran using similar

³⁴ Robins, page 52.

³⁵ Karsh, page 217.

³⁶ Antal, page 67.

³⁷ Aaron Davis, “A Military Analysis of the Iraqi Army Operations,” *Armor* November/December 1990, page 16.

highly coordinated, concentrated combined arms effort. Recognizing that this advance exceeded his objective, Saddam withdrew his army.³⁸

The net effect achieved Saddam's objective for a return to peace. He effectively orchestrated a military, economic and diplomatic strategy. At the strategic level, Saddam synchronized his use of targeting the civilian population, economic war and a profitable land offensive with a diplomatic effort. He accepted the UNSCR 598 for a cease-fire and a return to the internationally recognized border. In this final phase, he demonstrated the level of expertise required for a nation to achieve its realistic objectives. On August 20, 1988, Iran accepted the ceasefire.³⁹

Conclusion

War, some have suggested, is the most difficult task a nation can undertake. In 1980, Saddam demonstrated the accuracy of this sentiment. To be successful, Saddam needed to comprehend his strategic environment; he did. He needed to articulate political goals and set military objectives that directly enabled the political endstate; he did not. Initially, he set a limited military objective—to defeat the Iranian army in battle—which would not achieve the desired political endstate—to dissuade Khomeini from intervening in internal Iraqi affairs. Saddam accentuated his mistake by not employing the Iraqi armed forces in a suitable manner to achieve his military objectives. The Iraqi army was not prepared for the combined arms offensive required nor for the urban warfare that followed the failed armor offensive. Saddam foundered into a stalemate that allowed Khomeini to transform the conflict into an unlimited conflict for survival.

³⁸ Antal, page 67.

³⁹ Davis, page 16.

After enduring a violent counteroffensive, Saddam orchestrated all his strategic tools to achieve a revised political objective—the survival of his regime. Saddam synchronized his diplomatic overtures with his economic and military offensives. He employed all his forces with a significant degree of sophistication to convince Khomeini to accept the UN ceasefire. The sum of these initiatives combined to be far greater than any single one could have achieved alone. Ultimately Saddam gained incomparable synergistic effects and demonstrated a mastery of statecraft.

In the beginning, Saddam's failure in setting a national strategy got him bogged into a bloody quagmire. In the end, his ability to finesse these tools successfully extracted him from the desperate situation. Saddam had to, though, because a peace *status quo ante* was a better state than the war he initiated.

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